

FIRST AMERICAN ARMY ATTACKS IN SECOND MAJOR OPERATION

now and again one of our own great shells had gone howling overhead. The day had been one of shifting clouds and occasional autumnal rain squalls. The moon shone clear and the stars were brilliant, but over the land a heavy white mist lay like a wet cloth, a sheltering mist through which the ever-thickening traffic crept silently along the roads that led to the battlefield.

Then, quite suddenly, all the guns spoke at once. It was the beginning of a three-hour bombardment which smashed German roads and wires, mowed German batteries, sought out and pulverized German P.C.'s, fell like a rain of death on moving German troops, and drove scuttling under ground all living creatures over there.

No Answer Awakened

There was no answer. If there had been, it could not have been heard. For so many miles as one could see, by the myriad, ceaseless flashes in the night, our own guns were cursing from every crest and clump. At first you could hear the whine of our own shells, the echo from hill to hill, the harsh swishing of the water in the swamps, the angry rattle against the hedgebacks and even, sometimes, the shrill, sharp commands, heard like foot ball signals from some nearby battery. But as the fury reached its crescendo, the whine of our shells, the tones were lost in the instant succession of the shots.

The cargo of many a ship, the strain and sweat of many a stevedore, the sale of untold thousands of Liberty bonds, the toll of many millions of devoted hands came into their own in that bombardment.

Its intensity can be estimated from the fact that the count of the rounds fired on one-third of the American front amounted to 10,000 from the larger guns and 70,000 from the 75's.

Its sound can be guessed by the fact that when, after dawn, the firing subsided somewhat and the batteries were content to shoot only one gun a minute, it seemed to the toilers underneath as though a strange restful hush had settled over the world. One of these toilers, a driver on the high seat of an ammunition truck, shivered inside his leather jacket and confided to his steering wheel: "Oh, Lord, thanks be I'm not on the other end of that noise."

Just Before Zero

That noise reached its most deafening climax in the last few minutes before the zero hour. That is the period of most painful expectancy, when anxious eyes follow the creeping minute hands on thousands upon thousands of synchronized watches. At 5:30 the first faint sign of dawn would be showing in the long waiting line of the guns. The Infantry would be up and over the top. And every one behind them, from the generals to the cooks, knew in his proud and confident heart that for a time there would be only one problem. For all the rest of the day, waiting would be the order.

Then 5:30 came and an observer, crouched in such a vantage point, say, as any one of those look-outs which indent the parapet on the crest of Hill 201, must needs strain his eyes through the mist that blanketed the valley below. The trench and those within it were completely hidden from view. Then, a few moments later, and it was a sight to carry with him to his grave, out from under the edge of the mist, swarming like a multitude of tawny bees from some giant hive, out and on and up the hill the doughboys went.

In an instant, the wires hummed with the noise. Signals flew from the hill tops, pigeons sprang into the air with the tidings and overhead the hovering aircraft paused, wheeled and started back. Soon from each of them would drop to some open field a gleaming cylinder, traceable in its passage through the air by its fluttering streamer of white, messages from the air to the waiting commanders in the rear.

"Over on the Minute"

The burden of all these messages was pretty much the same along the whole 20 mile front. Take one flashed back by a corporal, squatting, telephone in hand, at a forward station. He may have tried to keep his voice level and military. His report, as it was caught on the typewriter in some message center far behind, will come down as follows: "The archives of the War Department at Washington. It read: 'Over on the minute.'"

It meant that the line—which had held at least that much ground for four long years and which had not moved an inch either way for more than a year—the line was moving at last, and toward Germany.

Then, as the Infantry rushed forward, smothering or passing by the rear guard machine gun nests and rounding up the disorganized German troops whose retreat had been cut off by the barrage, every other arm of the service took up the strain of moving forward. At the end of the second day, the counter attacks began, came thicker and faster in the days succeeding as the resistance stiffened, brought with them fierce, close hand-to-hand fighting as the battle line swayed back and forth. But for the first two days, it was a matter of pursuit, and for all the Army, the reverse task of keeping up with the Infantry.

Moving Up Starts Early

That movement had begun at midnight the night before. At midnight some battalions of 75's had fired a few rounds and then packed up to start forward. The night was dark and foggy, and they were so early that before sundown they were pitched on new hillsides and, without waiting for camouflage or good emplacements, were firing steadily into the receding German lines.

The pace set for them can be gauged by the fact that one regimental column, after marching the first 10 miles at its old stand until 9 on Thursday morning, jumped forward eight kilometers and was at work in Cuisy by noon of the first day. By sundown of that first day the Infantry lines in some places had gone forward more than five miles, and through the maze of traffic which clogged the crazy roads, the urgent message ran back: "Guns before all else, and then food for the guns. Rations second, ammunition first."

To get the guns up, meat and coffee must wait. Everything except the horses—must wait. If horses could be killed or, having done their level best, should drop from exhaustion, then human muscles must push the guns on their way. If a big gun should explode in some shell hole and despite of noise on to the assigned position, it must be taken to that shell hole, its position and open fire from there. More than once these things happened.

The problem of moving up the guns and the other supplies was made both supremely important and supremely difficult through the fact that the day after the nature of the terrain over which the

Americans were fighting—one of the most difficult battlefields in Europe—and by the conditions in which four years of battle had left that terrain. Here was a stretch of French country all little hills and valleys. In the summer of 1914 it was beautifully carpeted with green, field after field of well husbanded farms, with here and there a golden wheat or unbordered with scarlet poppies, and here and there a village of stone-homes with red-tiled roofs.

Now it looks as though the hand of some grotesquely gigantic leper had reached out of the East and touched it. It is a desolate country. There are no homes, no life, no verdure. Here and there is some crumbled stone where a house once stood, here and there the blackened stump of a blasted tree. For the rest there is only a scorched, bleak countryside, pitted with shell holes and mine craters, with the face of the moon.

From these shell holes German rear-guards turned their machine guns on the backs of the advancing Yankees. From them, as the mists of the first morning cleared away, Germans emerged in batches large and small, to be taken into custody by the mopping-up parties and sent to the rear by thousands, where the number of prisoners captured on the first day.

Still the Prisoners Come

Not only that first morning, but off and on the high Thursday, Friday and Saturday, little bands of them would trickle out of the underground hiding places whether they had taken refuge when the shelling began and whence they had been afraid to come out, so deep-rooted was their conviction that Americans were accustomed to hold their prisoners in the rear. They would be found by Yanks on a still hunt for souvenirs.

Two famished Boches emerged as late as Saturday from a deep dugout that was not more than a good rifle shot from the dugout of a general commanding an American reserve battalion.

Aside from these shell holes and remnants of abandoned trenches, the waterless, foodless land for several kilometers in depth offered not a vestige of shelter, not a hedge or even a clump of green behind which a gun might hide, or in the scant protection of which a line of trucks might move unmolested.

One Wall for a Village

As for the villages which the first few days recaptured, some are so completely obliterated that runners passed through them in broad daylight, never once stumbling that a village had ever stood there.

One messenger, knowing that a general's P.C. had been set up in a certain town which looked imposing enough on the map, found when he came to the place that only a part of one wall of one house remained to identify it. Against this wall, a telephone was placed.

"Where is the divisional P.C.?" the runner asked of the officer at the telephone.

"You're in it now," replied the officer with a grin.

Of other towns, such as Cuisy and Montfaucon or Béthincourt, more is left, but not enough on which to build anew, and sometimes you can recognize the church, where weeds grow rank through the stones of the floor, only by the remnants of painted angels littering a heap of stones which was once an altar.

But it was neither in terms of battle nor in terms of restoration that this ter-

rain presented its most serious problem during the first few days of the battle. It was in terms of traffic.

Roads over which no vehicle had passed since the summer of 1914, roads recognizable after four years only as serpentine paths weaving discontinuously among the shell holes, roads in which mine craters yawned past all hasty bridging, these had to receive and bear during the first three days a volume of heavy, ceaseless traffic that would have worried a dozen Lincoln Highways.

In Terms of Traffic

That is why the pioneers—both Engineer and Infantry—went for days and nights without stopping to sleep or eat. That is why the clink of pick and shovel working ahead of the trucks, working with one's hands, will ever be music in the ears of the American Army. Theirs was the task of getting the guns up, and get them up they did, faster in some places than in others, but still the guns moved on through the rain, and the ammunition followed.

Even had the roads been perfect from the start, the traffic problem would have still been enormous, and those who went through it will never forget the paralyzing congestion. Every one helped. Every one had to help. The sight no one could stand was the spectacle of a long train of ambulances, stalled in the rain, the drivers engine, the ambulance carrying only the wounded within silent and uncomplaining save when one of them might reach out and ask for a smoke or a pull on a passing canteen.

Perhaps, when it meant just a short impossible blockade, an officer would jump down from a truck and call for volunteers. "These men have paid the price," and we've got to see them through to the hospitals. "Maybe we can cut a road through this wire and mud that will skirt these fouled trucks blocking the way. Pitch in, everybody."

Road Built in Twinkling

Then down from the trucks, out from under tarpaulins, emerging here from a hastily made bed beside the road or there from a roadside kitchen, the volunteers would jump down from a truck and call for volunteers. "These men have paid the price," and we've got to see them through to the hospitals. "Maybe we can cut a road through this wire and mud that will skirt these fouled trucks blocking the way. Pitch in, everybody."

In such traffic jams, when an occasional ill-advised chuck full of officers' baggage would be chucked ruthlessly to the side and when snubhorn drivers must be coerced to breed in them then and there the right commonly spirit, the strong-armed M.P. was the king of the road and the hero of the hour. Every cross road clamored for him over the wires. Things went best where the M.P. at the corner was a square-jawed, hard-boiled Yankee who, when a truck seemed disinclined to do his bidding on the instant, would waste no words but draw his gun suggestively and say: "You do what I tell you or I'll blow what little brains you've got to the other end of Hell."

At the End of the Sixth Day

With roads laid under and in front of the moving traffic, with such M.P.'s to straighten out the tangles, slowly through the mud and rain the guns moved up. By the end of the sixth day the Yankees in the Argonne had pushed on in some places to a depth of 12 kilometers.

YANKS SHARE IN CRACKING HINDENBURG LINE

Continued from Page 1
the advance that added one more peril to Hindenburg's positions in Hensry and crossed the since fulfilled threat to St. Quentin.

The fighting during the morning was bitter. That shortly after noon the Americans had sent back upwards of 1,200 prisoners is not so much an indication that the Boche did not fight as that the American Concrete pill boxes there were in plenty against which rifle fire was impotent, and which were put out of commission by the tanks or stilled when they had been encircled after the occupants had been routed or slain with bombs. On more than one occasion after the first advancing waves had passed over the terrain, the second wave, advancing in its wake, found the Germans reestablished in their former positions, having come up from underground. Pitched battles between small detachments were numerous.

Concrete Aids Enemy

"Fritz fought well behind concrete," said one doughboy, receiving treatment at a field dressing station for a shrapnel wound in the arm, "but as soon as we got him into a corner it was 'kamerad.'" The towns of Bellecourt and Nauroy fell to the Americans only after severe fighting, the defense being by machine guns in great numbers, but the southern entrance of the Bellecourt tunnel, the most important, possibly, and certainly the most interesting of the American objectives, fell without a struggle.

The effectiveness of the smoke barrage put up to conceal the operations of the Americans was enhanced by a shrapnel mist which hung over the battlefield and the company detailed to take and hold the tunnel entrance, deviating slightly from its direction, crossed the hillcrest above the canal to the north of its objective. They had gone on for several miles in great numbers, but the southern entrance of the Bellecourt tunnel, the most important, possibly, and certainly the most interesting of the American objectives, fell without a struggle.

"One of our men spoke German, and he asked one of our prisoners where the entrance to the tunnel was. The German offered to guide us to it. We approached it from above, and as we got near, eight or ten Germans who had been standing just inside ran up the bank shouting 'Kamerad.'"

They took them in tow and went down in front of the tunnel. We could only see down a little way. There were many machine guns around and a sort of con-

crete breastworks. I believe some of the Germans were mounted in concrete. "We shouted down the tunnel and ordered the Germans to come out. After a couple of minutes some Germans came out in single file with their hands up. There were 150 of them, including three or four officers, one a captain."

Entering the Tunnel

"After that we entered the tunnel. It was fitted up like an Old Folks Home. The waterway was about 30 feet wide, with a board walk on each side. Caverns had been dug out of the side, and all sorts of things were stowed there, including food. The canal was full of barges, which had been fitted up for troop quarters. We went up several hundred yards and there was just one more after another, all of them modeled for the use of troops. Most of them contained bunks. A few were fitted up as mess halls and as officers' quarters. "There was one with a piano aboard and a moving picture screen, evidently used as a combination caucuses, concert hall and music theater. There were galleries leading off in several directions, and apparently another gallery above the tunnel itself.

"There was a fire in some of the cooking ranges and food actually on the fire. We had a hot meal an hour after we took the place, and during the afternoon and night we used it as a sort of emergency station for wounded."

Begun by Napoleon

Thus fell the southern end of the Bellecourt tunnel, the construction of which was begun by Napoleon in 1814, half a century after Louis XIV had started and abandoned a similar project. The hundred yards eastward, the ruins of which are still existent. For four years the Germans had utilized the tunnel as quarters for troops and a vast, secure place of storage for supplies of all sorts. The Americans who took it were the first persons to examine it, other than German, since 1914. East of the canal, after the Australians had pressed ahead to carry on and exploit the gains of the Americans, bitter fighting took place. In many places the Boche fought with desperation. And, with the mud, which made Yanks and Aussie alike and indistinguishable the one from the other, it was no wonder that many Americans strayed into Australian detachments and advanced with them and that many a hard-fought battle was fought. The globe fighting should be to shoulder. But the mud was not responsible for

PRISONERS ON WAR WORK

[BY CABLE TO THE STARS AND STRIPES] AMERICA, Oct. 3.—Even the prisoners are shouting for a chance to do war work. New Jersey is now considering what labor it can set them to, and Maryland already has turned over about 400 to the Baltimore Department of Public Works, to the United States Health Department, and the railroads.

MOTORLESS SUNDAY RECORD

[BY CABLE TO THE STARS AND STRIPES] AMERICA, Oct. 3.—Our motorless Sundays have so well saved gasoline that we have already shipped to France ten ships with 50,000 barrels aboard each. There has been no break anywhere in the "motorless" observance.

RADIATORS MADE INTO GUNS

[BY CABLE TO THE STARS AND STRIPES] AMERICA, Oct. 3.—Instead of turning our swords into plowshares, we are turning radiators into guns. The first carload of cannon built by the New Jersey Radiator Works for destroyers, transports and merchantmen have been delivered, tested and found O.K.

Apartment dwellers earnestly hope that after the war the radiator makers will return to making radiators which are equally hot stuff.

"Come over in 1917, eh? What boat?" "Search me. It's so many years ago I've forgotten."

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